

Message Text

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67

ACTION EUR-10

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-07 NSCE-00 CIAE-00 INR-10

NSAE-00 RSC-01 H-01 NEA-06 PRS-01 IO-03 DRC-01 /055 W

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R 181606Z APR 74

FM AMEMBASSY BELGRADE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9131

C O N F I D E N T I A L BELGRADE 1877

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OVIP (SENATOR EDWARD KENNEDY)

SUBJECT: KENNEDY'S CONVERSATION WITH TITO

1. BEFORE LUNCH AT WHITE PALACE APRIL 17 SENATOR KENNEDY HAD HOUR PRIVATE CHAT WITH PRESIDENT TITO WITH ONLY INTERPRETER PRESENT, WITH ADDITIONAL 20 MINUTE CONVERSATION IN WHICH KARDELJ AND I PARTICIPATED. EN ROUTE AIRPORT HIS MORNING BEFORE HIS MOSCOW DEPARTURE, SENATOR GAVE ME FOLLOWING RUNDOWN ON PRINCIPAL POINTS AND IMPRESSIONS OF HIS EXCHANGE WITH TITO, POINTING OUT THAT FULLER REPORT WOULD BE CONVEYED SECRETARY ON HIS RETURN TO WASHINGTON:

A. TITO--AS WERE ALL YUGOSLAV INTERLOCUTORS WHOM KENNEDY MET DURING SHORT STAY IN BELGRADE--WAS UP TIGHT ON TRIESTE, STRESSING THIS ISSUE HIGHLY SENSITIVE AND EMOTIONAL ONE FOR YUGOSLAVIA AND UNDERLINING DETERMINATION ALL YUGOSLAVS RESIST ANY CHANGE IN STATUS OF ZONE B. TITO DISPLEASED BY PRESSURE ON YUGOSLAVS WHICH HE READ INTO US-ITALIAN ADRIATIC EXERCISE AND SIXTH FLEET PORT VISITS TO TRIESTE;

B. TITO EXPRESSED UNHAPINESS AT DETERIORATION IN US-YUGOSLAV RELATIONS LAST FALL BUT FELT PROSPECT FOR IMPROVED TIES NOW CONSIDERABLY BETTER AS A RESULT OF SECRETARY'S MEETING WITH MINIC IN NEW YORK ON WHICH BE FULLY BRIEFED;

C. ON MIDDLE EAST TITO REPORTED FULLY ON HIS RECENT EXCHANGES
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WITH SADAT, LEAVING WITH SENATOR IMPRESSION THAT

SADAT'S CURRENT COURSE OF ACTION SUPPORTED IN LARGE MEASURE BY YUGOSLAVS. TITO DID FEEL HOWEVER THAT SYRIAN DISAFFECTION COULD CREATE REAL PROBLEMS AND THIS HE SAID MIGHT HAVE BEEN AVOIDED IF SADAT HAD TAKEN SYRIANS INTO HIS CONFIDENCE FROM THE VERY BEGINNING, PARTICULARLY WITH REGARD TO SIX POINT PROPOSAL. UNLESS SYRIA COULD BE BROUGHT IN LINE--AND THIS SEEMED DOUBTFUL SO LONG AS APPROACH TO MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT WAS PIECEMEAL--TITO FELT WHOLE INCIPIENT PEACE STRUCTURE WOULD COLLAPSE AND HOSTILITIES WOULD BE RESUMED;

D. WITH REGARD CSCE TITO HAD FEELING US WAS ENGAGED IN BIT OF FOOT DRAGGING. TITO HOPED THAT AGREEMENT ON OUTSTANDING ISSUES COULD BE REACHED QUICKLY AND SUMMIT CONFERENCE CONVENED. HE POINTED OUT THAT WHILE MBFR NOW STALEMATED SUCCESS CSCE MIGHT WELL HAVE CONSTRUCTIVE EFFECT ON VIENNA TALKS;

E. ON BREZHNEV TITO FELT THAT SOVIET LEADER WAS IN STRONG PERSONAL POSITION; HE HAD PLACED HIS MEN IN KEY POSITIONS AND IT SEEMED UNLIKELY HE WOULD FACE THREAT TO HIS PERSONAL POWER POSITION FROM ANY QUARTER IN FORESEEABLE FUTURE. BREZHNEV, TITO FELT, WAS SINCERE IN HIS DENTENTE POLICY AND ONLY "WORLD DISASTER" WOULD IMPEL HIM TO CHANGE COURSE.

2. KENNEDY WAS VERY MUCH IMPRESSED WITH TITO'S CONFIDENT GRASP OF ISSUES, IMPRESSIVE ABILITY TO CITE STATISTICS ON VARIOUS ASPECTS YUGOSLAV ECONOMY, AND HIS APPARENTLY ACCURATE RECALL OF EVENTS LONG PAST. KENNEDY DESCRIBED HIM AS BEING IN FINE PHYSICAL SHAPE FOR A MAN OF HIS YEARS AND IN COMPLETE CONTROL OF ALL HIS FACULTIES. THIS BORNE OUT BY MY OWN OBSERVATIONS OF TITO DURING EXCHANGE AT TWO AND HALF HOUR LUNCH WHEN HE DOMINATED TABLE CONVERSATION, ANSWERED ALL QUESTIONS ALERTLY AND WITHOUT HESITATION, AND WAS ABSTEMIOUS OF NEITHER WINE NOR TOBACCO--A TRULY REMARKABLE PERFORMANCE BY A MAN WHO, ACCORDING TO SOME QUARTERS, IN ON HIS LAST LEGS.
TOON

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 18 APR 1974
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: golinofr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974BELGRA01877
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740090-0905
From: BELGRADE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740434/aaaabefn.tel
Line Count: 96
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: golinofr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 20 MAR 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <20 MAR 2002 by collinp0>; APPROVED <07 MAY 2002 by golinofr>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: KENNEDY'S CONVERSATION WITH TITO
TAGS: OVIP, OREP, (KENNEDY, EDWARD M)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005